

Virginia Fire Services Board

Fire Prevention and Control Committee

Thursday, September 19, 2024

First Responder Virginia Conference

1000 19th St, Virginia Beach, VA 23451

2:45PM – MR5CD

MINUTES

A regular meeting of the Fire Prevention and Control Committee was held at the Virginia Beach Convention Center in Virginia Beach, VA. The meeting was called to order by Chair Steven Sites and a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Steven Sites, Committee Chair – Virginia Municipal League
Keith Johnson – Virginia Fire Chiefs' Association
JM Snell II – Board of Housing and Community Development
Ernie Little – Virginia Fire Prevention Association
Carla Keesee – Virginia Chapter of IAAI

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

Billy Hanks – Local Fire Marshal
John Miller – Department of Forestry

AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT

Troy Bower, Assistant State Fire Marshal
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager

GUESTS PRESENT

Matthew Clark Mike Perdue
Glenn Dean

CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

No changes to the agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comment provided.

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CONSENT AGENDA

Motion: To approve the minutes of the previous meeting (June 2024)

Motion: Johnson **Second:** Snell

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Minutes approved.

REPORT FROM THE VIRGINIA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Assistant State Fire Marshal Troy Bower presented. He began by honoring the life of Steve Phillips and stated that interviews were being conducted for an Assistant Chief of the Virginia Fire Marshal Academy (VFMA). VFMA is working towards accreditation with the assistance of the Learning Development Division. The academy is working on two back-to-back basic law enforcement school options in 2025 because of demand. Twenty-four hours of continuing education is being offered at the conference and the 2025 VFMA schedule is pending.

Schools and public institutions of higher education are being inspected by the office. A new Deputy III in Special Operations has been hired. State Fire Marshal Hux, Steven Sites, and Andrew Milliken are representing the fire service on the Single Stairwell Work Group being held by the Department of Housing and Community Development.

CODES AND STANDARDS WORKGROUP UPDATES

Committee Chair Steven Sites presented on behalf of the workgroup. The workgroup met on September 17 to discuss single exit stairwells in R-2 occupancies. The group examined the effect on evacuations, firefighting operations, dormitories, emergency escapes, and firefighting resources in less developed areas. Other areas explored related to the single stairwells are exterior stair options, sprinklers, the type of construction, and landing sizes. Andrew Milliken and Steven Sites are representing the VFSB. Billy Hux is representing the State Fire Marshal's Office.

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Legislation in 2024 ordered the Board of Housing and Community Development (BHCD) to study the use of single stairwells in R-2 buildings. This would include dorms, apartments, and other R-2 structures. This movement is sweeping the country propelled by legislation. The advisory group was made up of homebuilders, contractors, architects, code officials, and a legislator. BHCD voted against this under the 2021 code cycle. The stated purpose of this

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movement is to create affordable housing and more housing, especially with space limitations in urban areas. Certain areas such as Seattle allow this. There was discussion about current standards in the Statewide Fire Prevention Code and that the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) white paper on the issue. The advisory group agreed it should go through the normal code development process. There are many remaining questions from multiple people on the group. There is a lack of data from Seattle and New York. Some builders on the advisory group stated they did not understand the intentions of the single stairwell concept. Sites stated the insurance industry needs to be involved and highlighted Committee Member Carla Keese with her role in the industry.

Sites yielded to Keith Johnson on the topic. Johnson spoke about his interactions with DHCD over the advisory group. Of the fifteen positions in the group, there are only three from the fire service. Ten out of fifteen are from the building industry. Johnson sent a letter to the Chair of the BHCD concerning the intentions of the advisory group and his disappointment with so little representation from the fire service. He requested a more balanced group with representatives from the Virginia Professional Fire Fighters, Virginia Fire Chiefs Association, Virginia State Firefighters Association, and the Virginia Fire Prevention Association. Johnson shared concerns with Sites. These groups usually lead to a non-consensus item at the BHCD. Johnson provided the VFSB with a joint IAFF and International Association of Fire Chiefs letter opposing single staircase structures.

Sites stated he appreciates the graphics work and strong support by VDFP Marketing and Communications in producing the Virginia Fire Prevention and Control Plan.

JM Snell questioned when this report was provided to the board. Committee Clerk Spencer Willett stated it was not in the board packet for the September meeting because it was approved previously. Snell further questioned quorum during the June meeting, which Willett clarified did exist for all committees and the board, except the Fire Training and Education Committee.

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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Johnson spoke about vacancies on the BHCD. He further explained his work to encourage people to apply for the vacant positions on the board. Four of five positions have been filled, but not by any of the fire service names submitted. One position in the 7th Congressional District remains open. Johnson was disappointed by the lack of traction getting fire service representation on the BHCD.

Motion: To approve Board Chair Keith Johnson to send a letter to the Governor asking to fill the vacant position with a fire service representative.

Motion: Johnson **Second:** Little

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Action recommended to the VFSB

Willett mentioned that he would be meeting with DHCD staff over the MOA between the BHCD and VFSB in October.

NEW BUSINESS

No New Business

ADJOURNMENT

Clerk of the Committee
Spencer R. Willett